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Piano Series

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A Scientific Basis for the Granting of
School Credit for Music Study

POST GRADUATE DIVISION
(GRADE FIVE)

CHAPTER III

PREPARED BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE

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III

THE LYRICISM OF MENDELSSOHN

§1. The title SONG WITHOUT WORDS might well be applied to most of Mendelssohn's works in the smaller forms, for there is scarcely a measure in his entire output which is not first and last lyrical. Whether written for the singing voice, for solo instrument, or for orchestra, every piece has its principal melody, and it is invariably of the most straightforward appeal. The particular series of piano pieces to which he affixed the title "Lieder ohne Worte," is indeed hardly to be classed with the characteristically instrumental pieces of the pianist's repertory. They are in reality songs, excepting that they have no words, and, since they were not to be sung they were permitted to surpass the range of the singing voice. Were it not for this fact they undoubtedly would have been supplied with texts long before now, although their directness would seem to render words entirely unnecessary.

They are, then, songs for the piano—lyric compositions reflecting a variety of moods—sometimes of large extent, usually of wide compass. The character of most of them is so distinct that scarcely a title even is needed. It is to be doubted whether the composer himself affixed titles to any of the separate pieces of the series; though it is evident that in such cases as the SPINNING SONG—which, it is said, was in reality written by Mendelssohn's sister, Fanny—the HUNTING SONG, several BOAT SONGS and certain others, in all probability he had in mind a definite subject or "program." Tschaikowsky undoubtedly paid tribute to Mendelssohn in his popular *Chant sans Paroles,* the French equivalent of the title used by Mendelssohn.

SONG WITHOUT WORDS — FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

Op. 62, No. 1 — 1809-1847

§2. In interpreting this SONG WITHOUT WORDS one should aim at a quiet and simple, yet elegant style, and the expression of sincere sentiment. The melody must be played with a clinging *legato* touch, and the phrasing should be carefully observed as indicated. The flowing accompaniment should be more or less subdued, and great care must be taken to join perfectly the figures which are divided between the hands. The short, sustained *motives* in the Bass, represented by the *half* notes (7-8) should be prominently emphasized. Where the melodic phrases begin upon an unaccented part of the measure (o) a little additional stress is required in the Bass. This is particularly necessary at the end of measure 14, where a *crescendo* is required. Five measures before the close a slight *ritardando* may be made (37), but the *tempo* is to be resumed shortly afterwards. However, the volume of tone should diminish throughout the last five measures.

SONG WITHOUT WORDS — FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

Op. 19, No. 1

§3. Like its companions this SONG WITHOUT WORDS is essentially lyrical. A happy mood prevails throughout, and one's fancy may picture a beautiful landscape, with a brook peacefully murmuring, while one's thoughts turn to the pleasant memories of life.

In preparing this Piece for performance, its songlike character should always be remembered. Care must be taken to produce a smooth *legato,* and a tone quality which seeks to imitate the voice. The accompaniment must always be subdued. Next after the melody, the Bass tones should be the strongest, but both are of course subject to shading, as indicated by the *crescendo* and *diminuendo* marks.

The harplike chords should, so to speak, accompany an imaginary voice, represented

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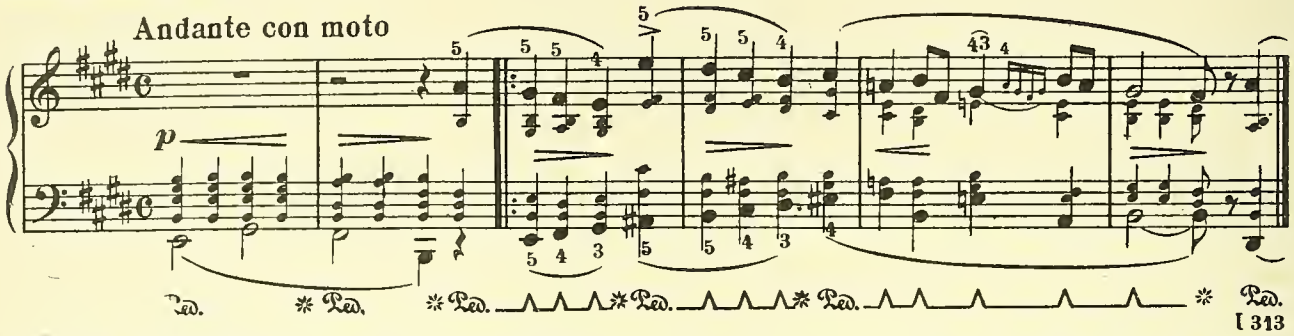
by the melody. In order to emphasize the tonal relationships it is well in the beginning to practise in the manner suggested in Illustration No. 1, each hand first taken separately, while care is exercised to bring out both the melody tones and the Bass tones with a stronger pressure. When both hands are combined the outer parts should bear a corresponding relationship to the accompanying tones.

Illustration No. 1



When practising the composition, the student must closely observe the accompaniment in the inner voices, so as to connect those tones which should be connected, and to lift the fingers at the proper moment. The conscientious student will first study the composition very slowly in order to watch every movement of his hands and fingers, and to prepare them quickly for the next position. By this means the way is prepared for a faster *tempo* and, finally, for perfection of style.

The player should always be keenly conscious of the form of the composition, to guide his own playing and to communicate to the listener his appreciation of the material and the use to which it has been put by the composer.

§4. Dynamic contrasts which embody the playing of a *sostenuto* melody against an accompaniment of *arpeggio* figures are among the most difficult to secure; for in many instances the ornamental figures of the accompaniment will overlap the melodic outline, at a point where the greatest control of dynamic forces is required. Naturally a melodic outline when standing as the topmost voice will be evident of itself by virtue of this position. This will be true regardless of highly motioned figures which may accompany it. But when placed in an inner or lower voice, a melodic outline usually requires much greater dynamic power than otherwise would be needed to bring it forward into greater prominence than the accompanying voices. Accompanying figures, the notes of which are of either less or greater time value than those of the melody, will tend less to obscure an inner or a lower voiced melody than a note-against-note harmonization. However, even with this naturally favorable condition, melodic importance requires a setting out of the melody.

§5. Theoretically considered, it is impossible to view melody in a comprehensive way unless it is viewed in connection with its harmonic background, consisting of a series of *chord*-progressions. Indeed, if one does not hear, or at least mentally perceive, such a background, a complete conception of a melodic progression cannot even exist.

Beginning with such a series of related harmonies, each one progressing to the next, there are at the disposal of the composer countless means by which to construct one or more progressions, such as will produce that single tone progression which is best adapted to suggest the trend of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic thought, and poetic mood. That particular voice is, then, the melodic outline, whether it receive its prominence from its position in relation to the other voices of the score, or whether it be elaborated to such an extent that its superimposed development imparts musical attributes that will force it first upon the attention of the ear.

In rhythmic figures of even tonal lengths the principal melodic interest will always be attracted to the upper tones; but if the

rhythmic divisions be unequal the melody may sound in any other voice and will come forward when either more or less motioned than the accompanying figure. The playing of such rhythmic accompaniments may therefore, with care, become contrapuntal in character, instead of taking on the character of mere *broken chord* designs.

Thus in a series of *broken chords* which interlock between the hands, there will be the upper and lower tones of each rhythmic design which will partake of the nature of an undisguised melodic progression. Of these two outlined progressions of single tones, the upper one will be the more prominent unless purposely it is mechanically subdued in order to give first place to the lower progression. By the same mechanical means, or by adding stress to certain tones, a melodic outline may also be brought forward within the score; that is, any inner-voiced single tone progression.

SONG WITHOUT WORDS — FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

Op. 67, No. 4

"Spinning Song"

§6. The so-called "Spinning Song" is one of the more definitely programmatic of the SONGS WITHOUT WORDS. The short introduction, corresponding to the instrumental prelude to a real song, represents the revolutions of the spinning wheel. This rapid rhythmic figure is maintained throughout the Piece, intermingling with the vivacious melody, the whirring of the wheel accompanying the song.

Rising and falling *chromatic* passages in the introductory measures, and also in several instances during the composition, more specifically suggest the humming of the wheel, and may be made very effective if played in the manner indicated by the sudden *crescendi* and *diminuendi.* Where melody notes and notes of the accompaniment are identical, the relation is indicated by the oppositely turned stems attached to a single note, the stems turning upward usually denoting the melody.

Slow practice and somewhat exaggerated force on the melody tones, while accompanying notes are played as softly as possible, will assist in acquiring the technic necessary to proper tone balance between melody and accompaniment.

Many opportunities for various degrees of tone shading are presented in this composition. The usual method of *crescendo* for ascending passages and *decrescendo* for descending, may sometimes be reversed with good effect. For instance, the ascending passage beginning on *D♯*, five measures before the end, may be played with gradually diminishing tone until an almost imperceptible *pianissimo* is reached on the final high note; and this may be cut short with a "snap," which to the more imaginative may suggest the breaking of a thread. The last two chords are to be played very softly and *staccatissimo,* keeping the upper notes distinct from the rest of the chord. A short pressure of the Damper Pedal may accompany the final chord.

§7. All musical compositions contain three primary elements; rhythm, melody and harmony. The chief difference then between works of greater and of lesser complexity is in the contrapuntal texture which is woven out of the musical material. In the highly developed contrapuntal works three or four melodies sound simultaneously—the melodies themselves producing the harmonic background as well as the melodic outline. This places the melodic and the harmonic elements upon an equal footing. In monophonic works the single melodic voice is placed in the foreground, and it is supported by harmonic colorings of less brilliancy. That is, the accompanying voices serve only to render the melodic progressions consecutively related. Of course in the monophonic style a counter-theme may appear at times in another voice, causing two melodies to sound simultaneously, but this in no way obscures the principal melodic outline which is usually in the uppermost voice.

§8. The student of piano playing who aspires to the career of an artist should acquire a clear understanding of the points upon which mastery in piano playing depends. It is not enough to have acquired a dependable technic, an efficient system of practice, and to

be willing to devote four to six hours daily to technical exercise and repertoire. These are essentials and they help to furnish the foundation for artistry. These things are matters of equipment for a career.

The young artist must also study that music which he expects to present to the public. He must not only know it thoroughly—and love it—but he must also examine it from the point of view of his hearers. They pay to hear him interpret certain notes, but their willingness to pay goes further still. It is the expression of a desire to get from the playing of the music something that satisfies them.

The sole object in a concert performance should not be to exploit the artist—though this would seem to be true in some instances—but to carry a message to the hearers, a message that can be given only through the medium of tones organized into a musical composition. If no message, no spiritual elevation or exaltation is imparted, the playing is more or less a failure except, perhaps, with a composition the avowed object of which is to exploit that item in an artist's equipment.

It is, therefore, a matter of prime necessity to the young artist to know, along with other things, the factors in music which make the strongest appeal to the hearer. The composition was written not for the private delight of the player, but to be presented by a competent artist to the great public of music lovers. The music, not the player, is the thing —to paraphrase a saying of Shakespeare's.

If one could secure an expression of opinion from ten thousand persons who, in the course of a year, hear considerable music, one would almost certainly learn that the great majority of the number look for what they call "melody" in music. Expressed in other words, that factor in a composition which is most readily appreciated by the average person, and that which he especially desires to hear, is the lyric element.

The application is easy and convincing: If the average person desires the lyric element to be made clear and evident to him then it follows that a prime obligation—and opportunity—for the player is to study profoundly the lyric element in any composition he may undertake to learn. Somewhere in the great majority of compositions in the concert and educational repertoire is a part which must sing, must stand out like a noble, sonorous voice, to which the other part of the musical texture is merely a back-ground.

Listen to a great artist when he is playing some composition with which you are thoroughly familiar. The melodies—or rather the principal melodies—stand out clearly, as if they were delivered by a soloist; it is a true example of singing melody. You may feel, while you listen, that you had really never learned the piece yourself, so vital and strong is the impression of this lyric, this singing quality. You hear the melodies through the mass of other sounds.

There is one other thought in this connection: Harmony, rhythm, scales, *arpeggios,* etc., are common property. But the lyricism, expressed in the melodies invented by the composer, are his own and are individual to him. Mendelssohn's lyricism differs from that of Chopin and Schumann, and is one of the distinctive qualities of his work as a composer. His lyricism is the thread that ties all other factors together, and it furnishes the clue to performance.

Therefore the student should value the opportunity to dig deep into the lyricism of a composition, first to make it his own, and then to give it out again with all the resources of his technical skill. The first thought should be to fix the lyric part of a composition by careful study and then test the ability to present it through all the accompanying parts and to make it sing with such beauty of tone that the hearer will accept the appeal and confess to the charm of the music.

It is not intended to create the impression that lyricism is the principal element in modern music. There is the dramatic, the descriptive, the impressionistic. But it is true that the largest percentage of musical compositions depend for their success with the hearer upon the lyric element. It is therefore the one upon which the young artist should concentrate his early study, and never cease to seek to make the melodies he finds in a composition SING.

SONG WITHOUT WORDS

G MAJOR, Nº XXV

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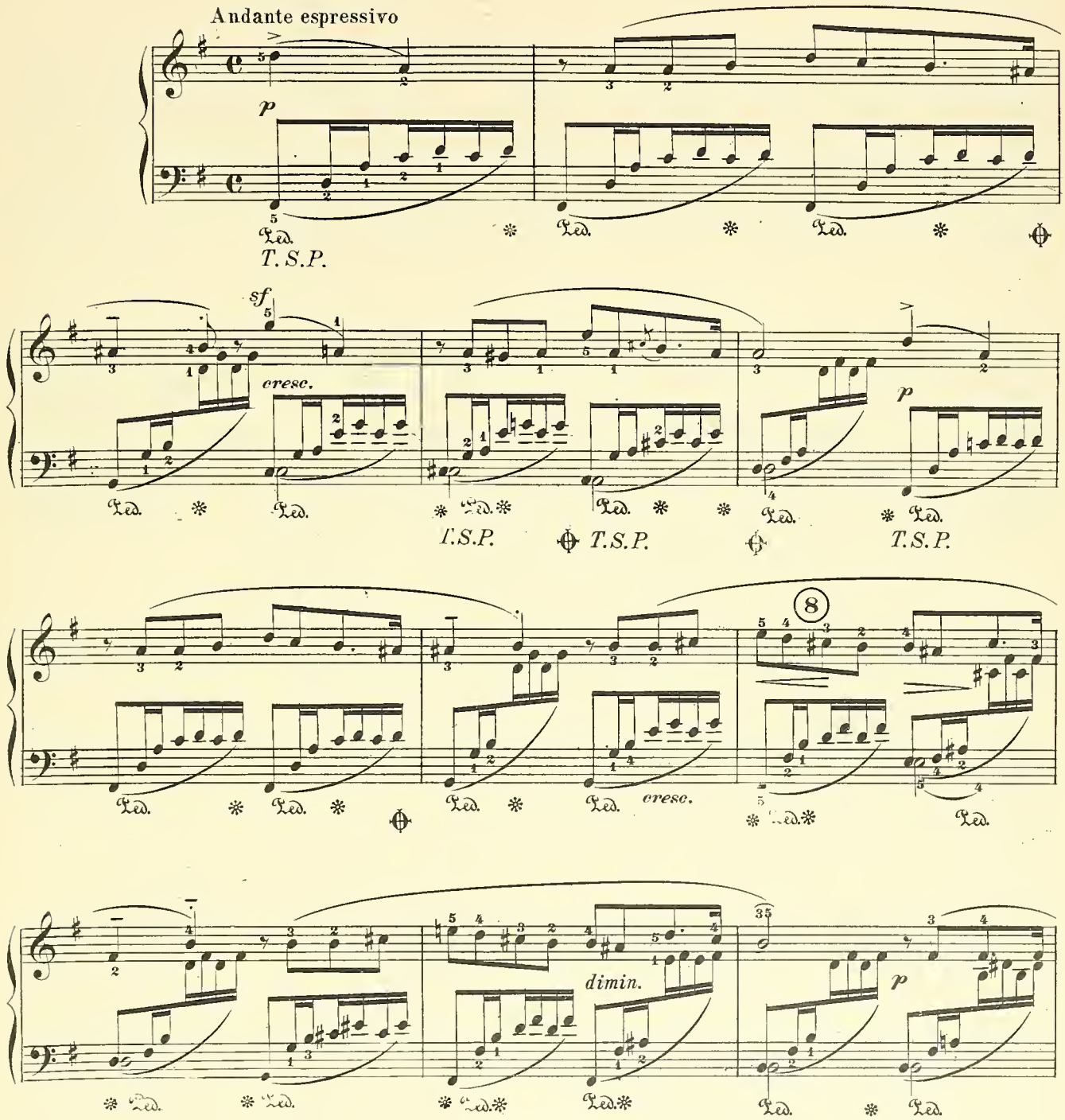
MENDELSSOHN
Op. 62, No. 1



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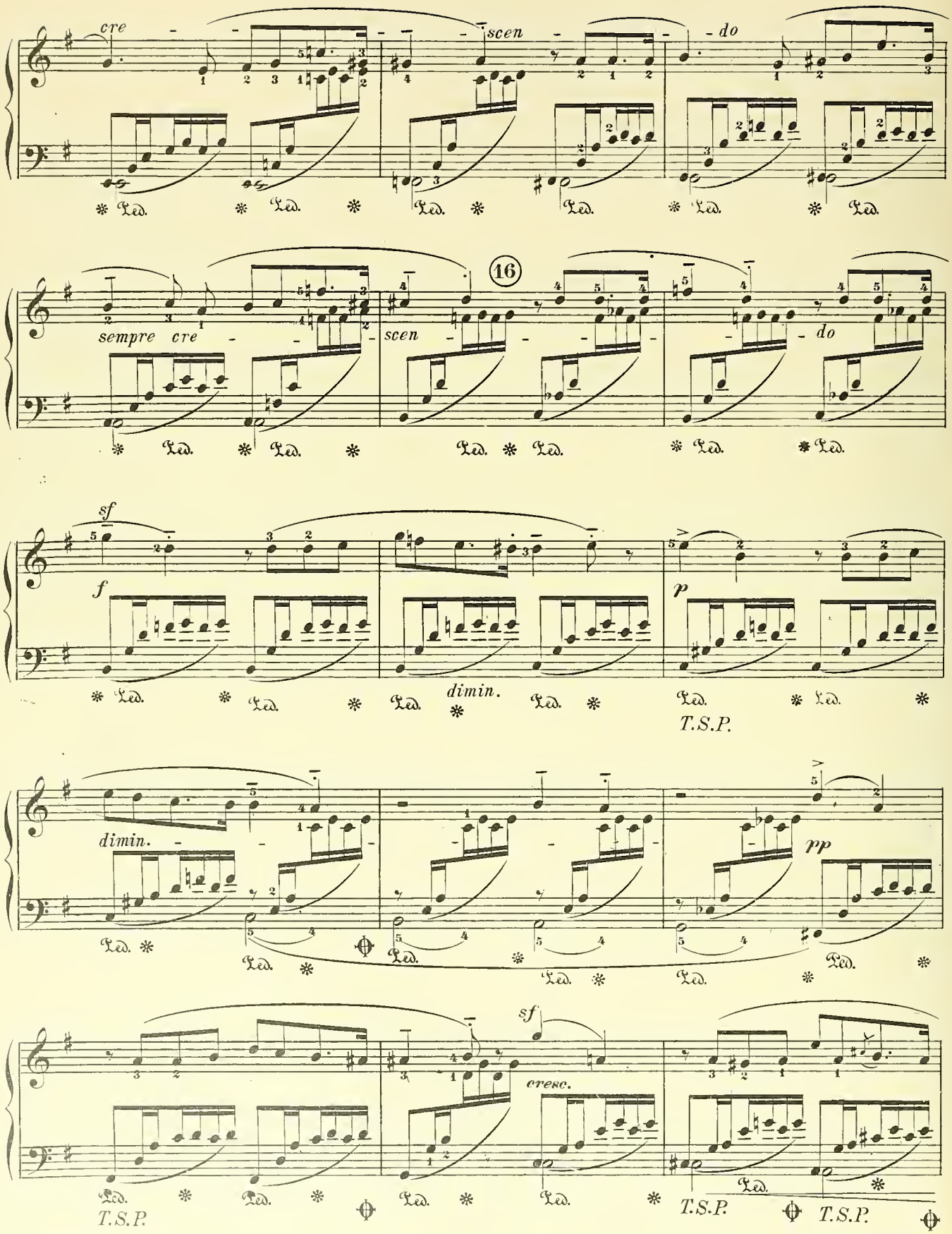
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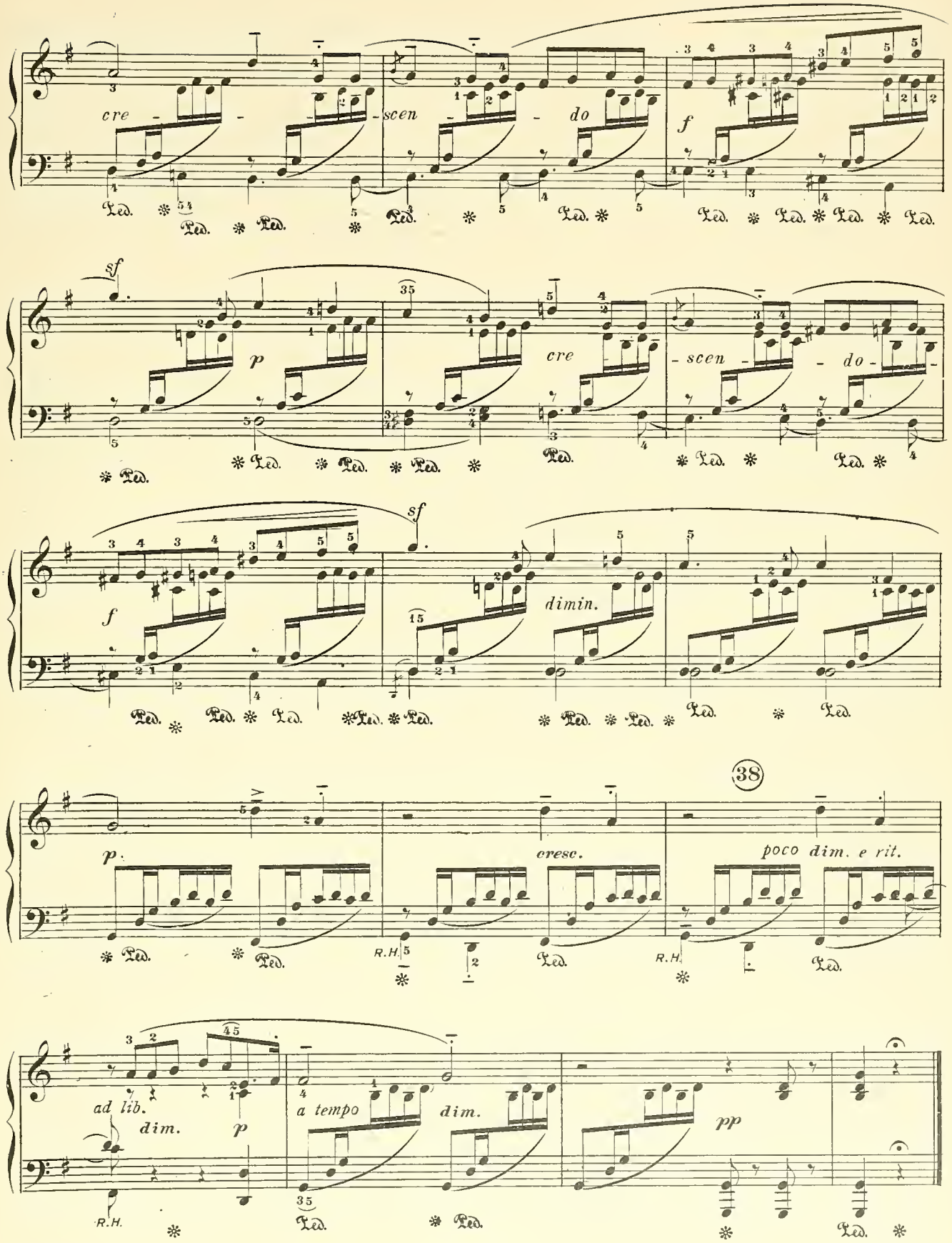
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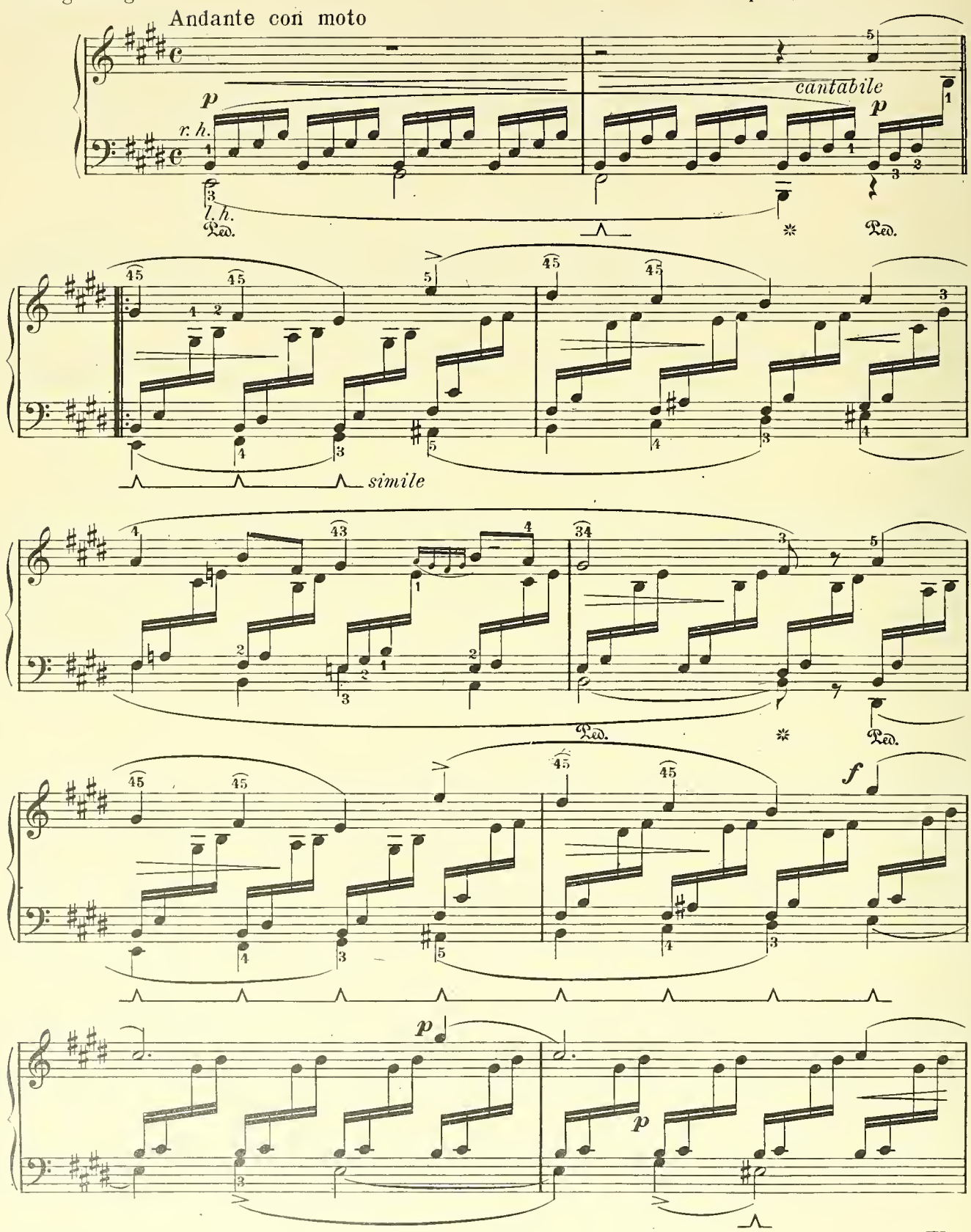
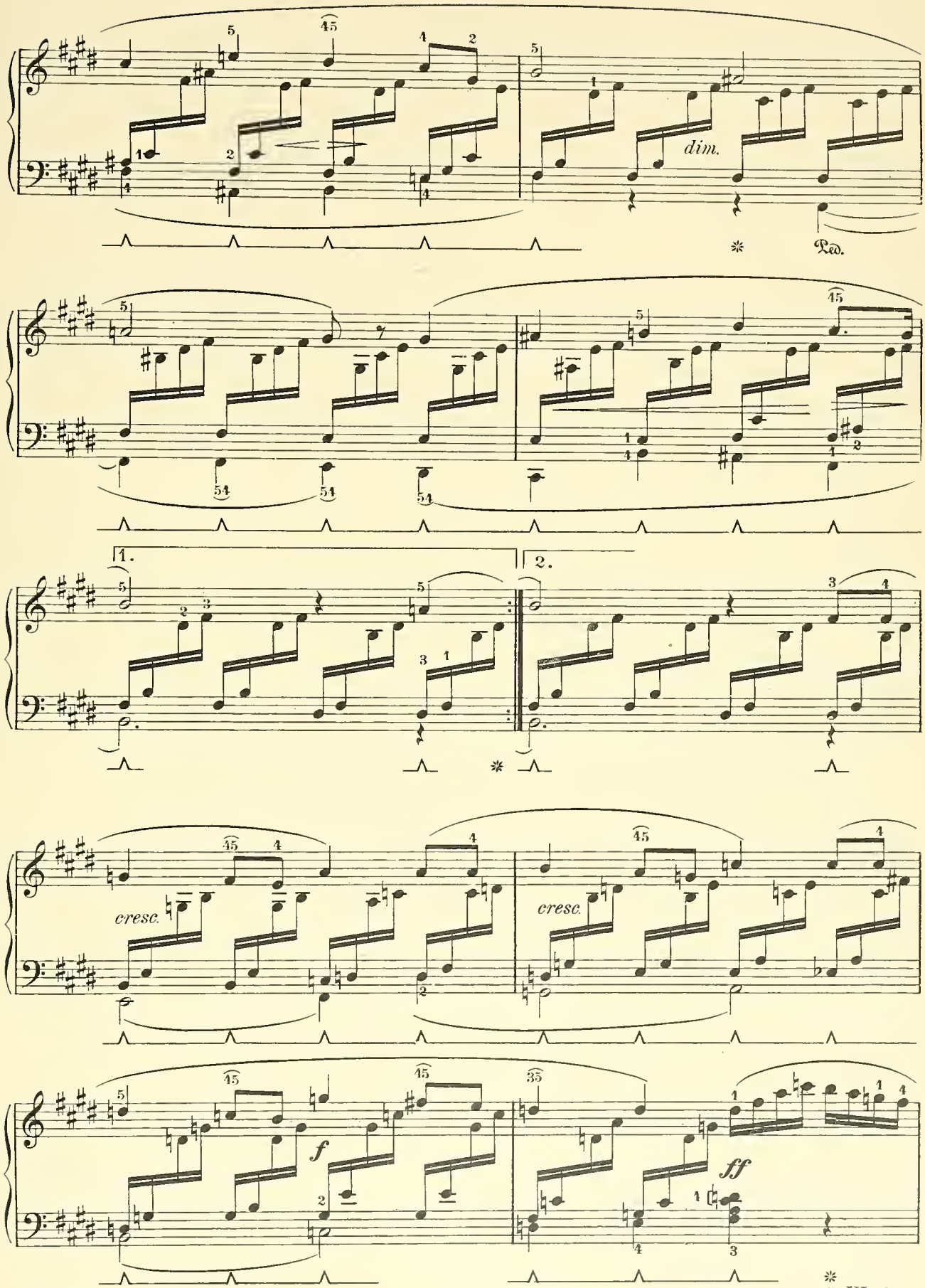
SONG WITHOUT WORDS

Edited by
Georg Kruger

FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY
Op. 19, No. 1

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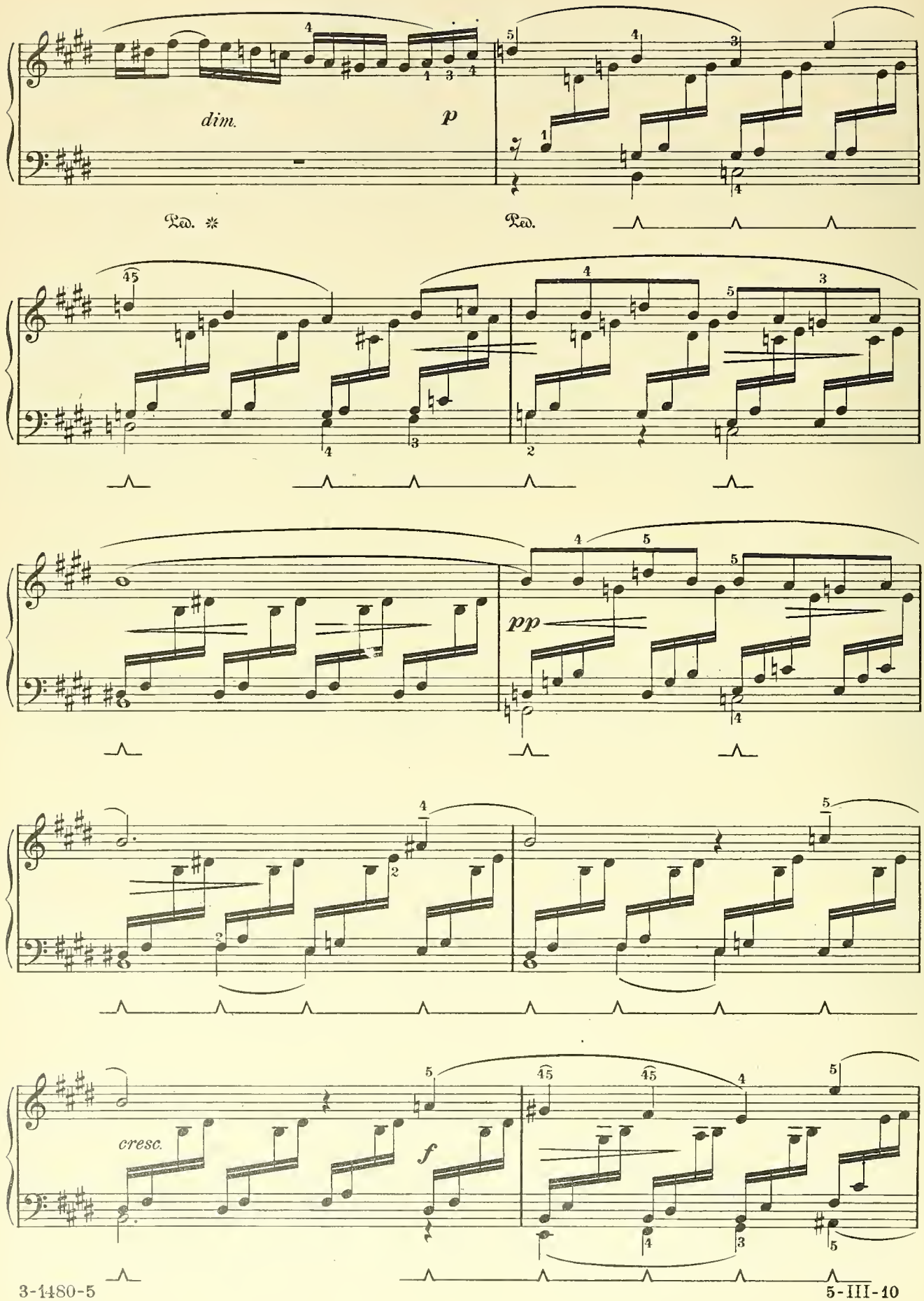
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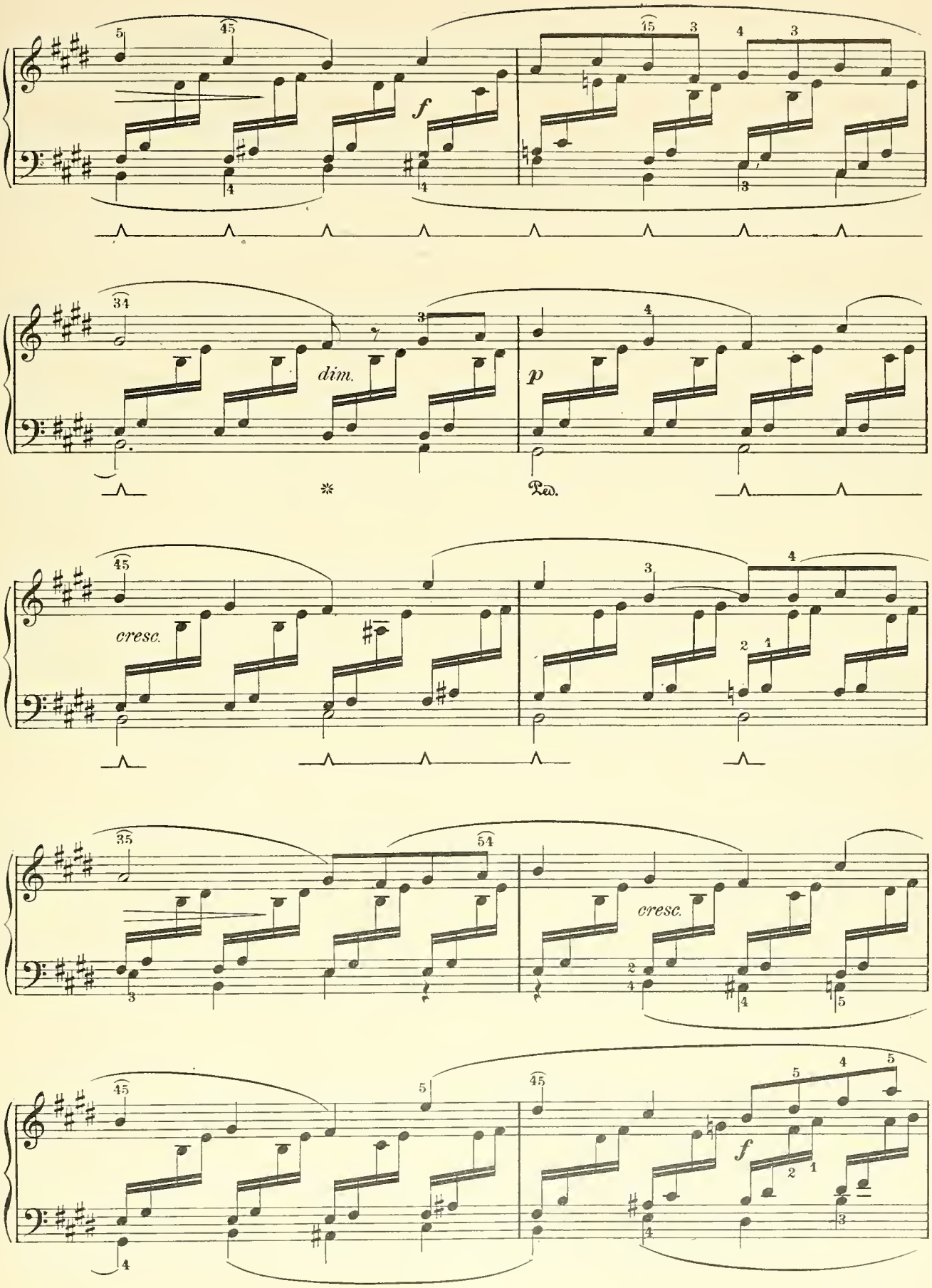
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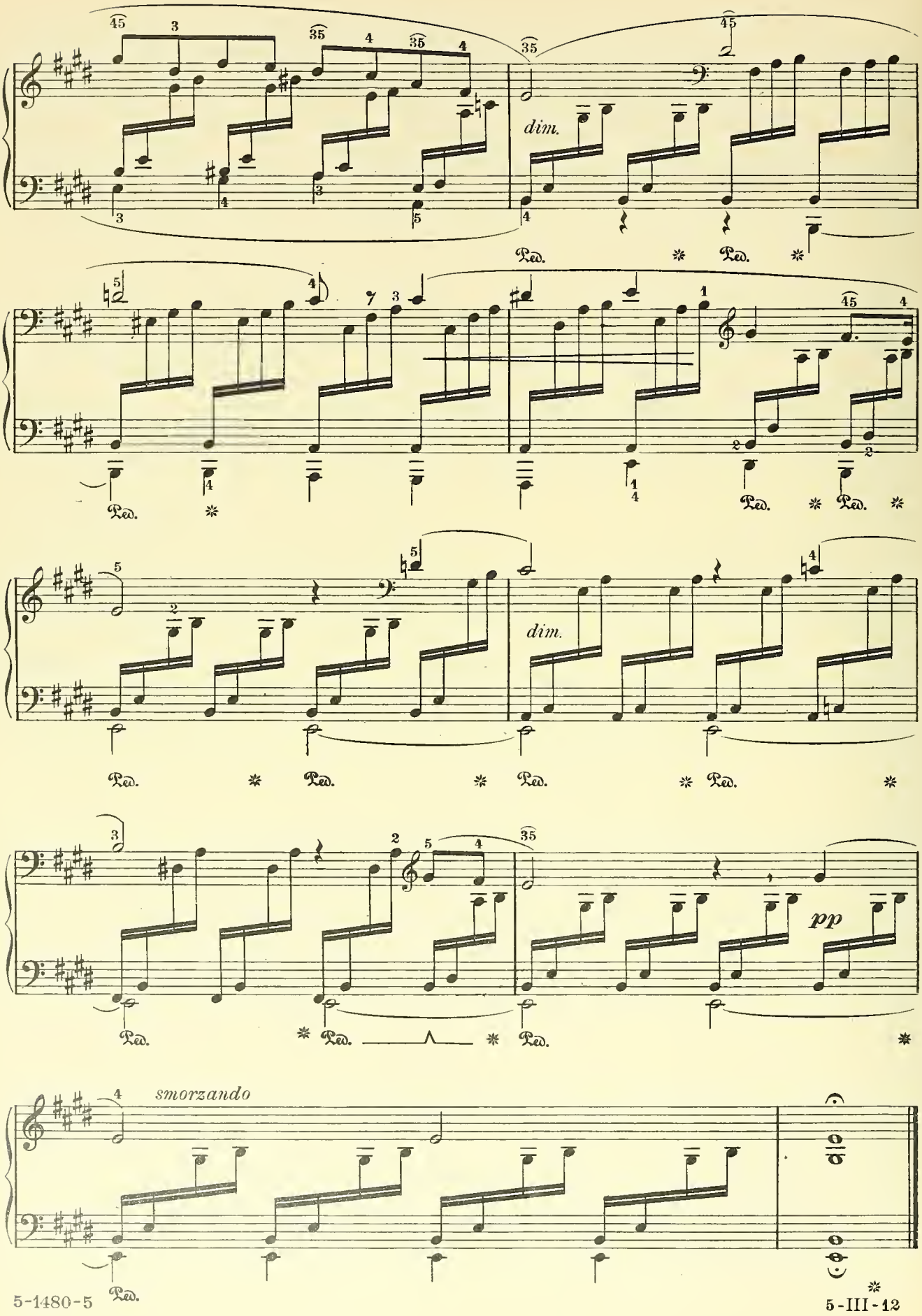
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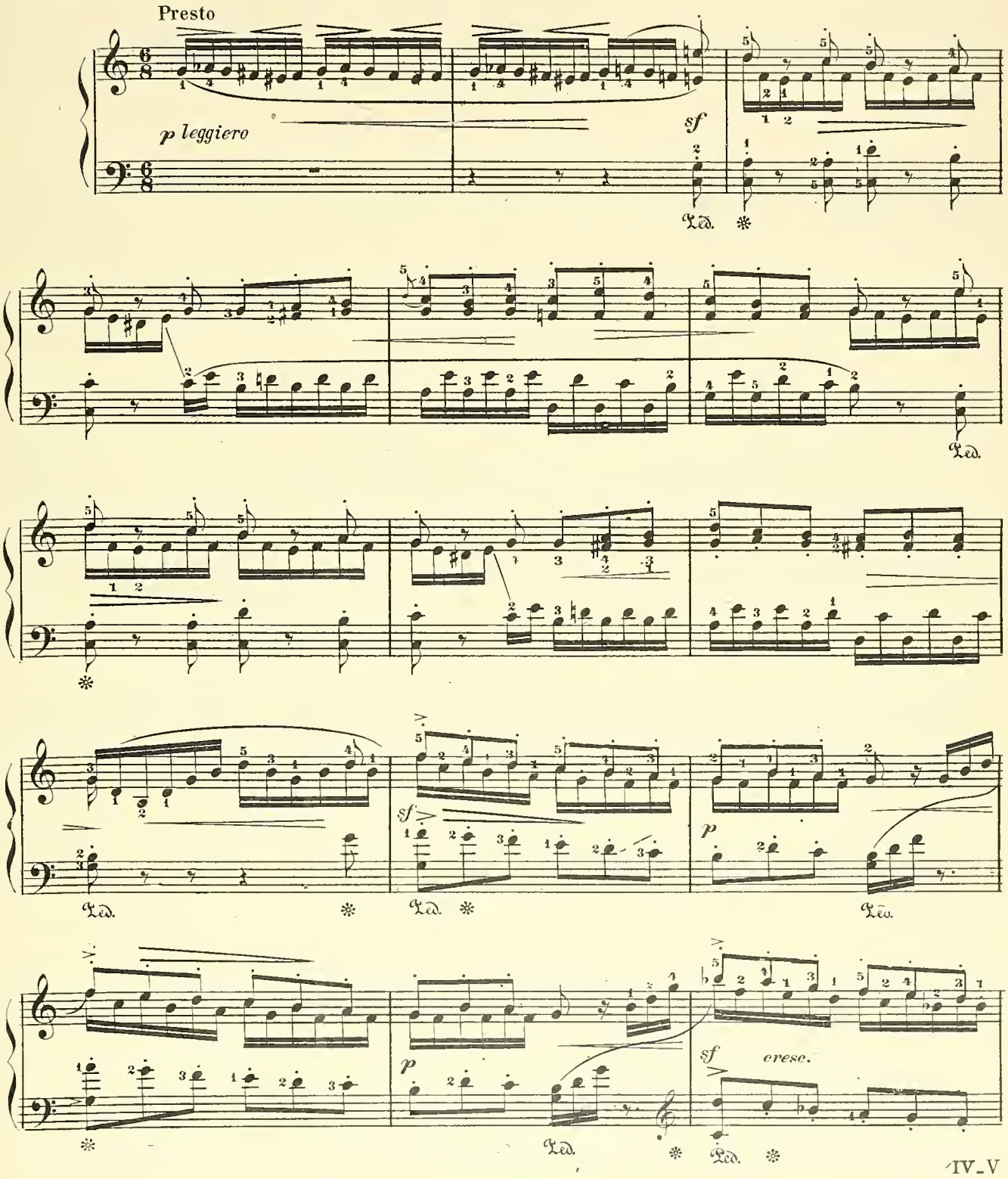
SPINNING SONG

SONG WITHOUT WORDS
No. XXXIV

F. MENDELSSOHN
Op. 67, No. 4



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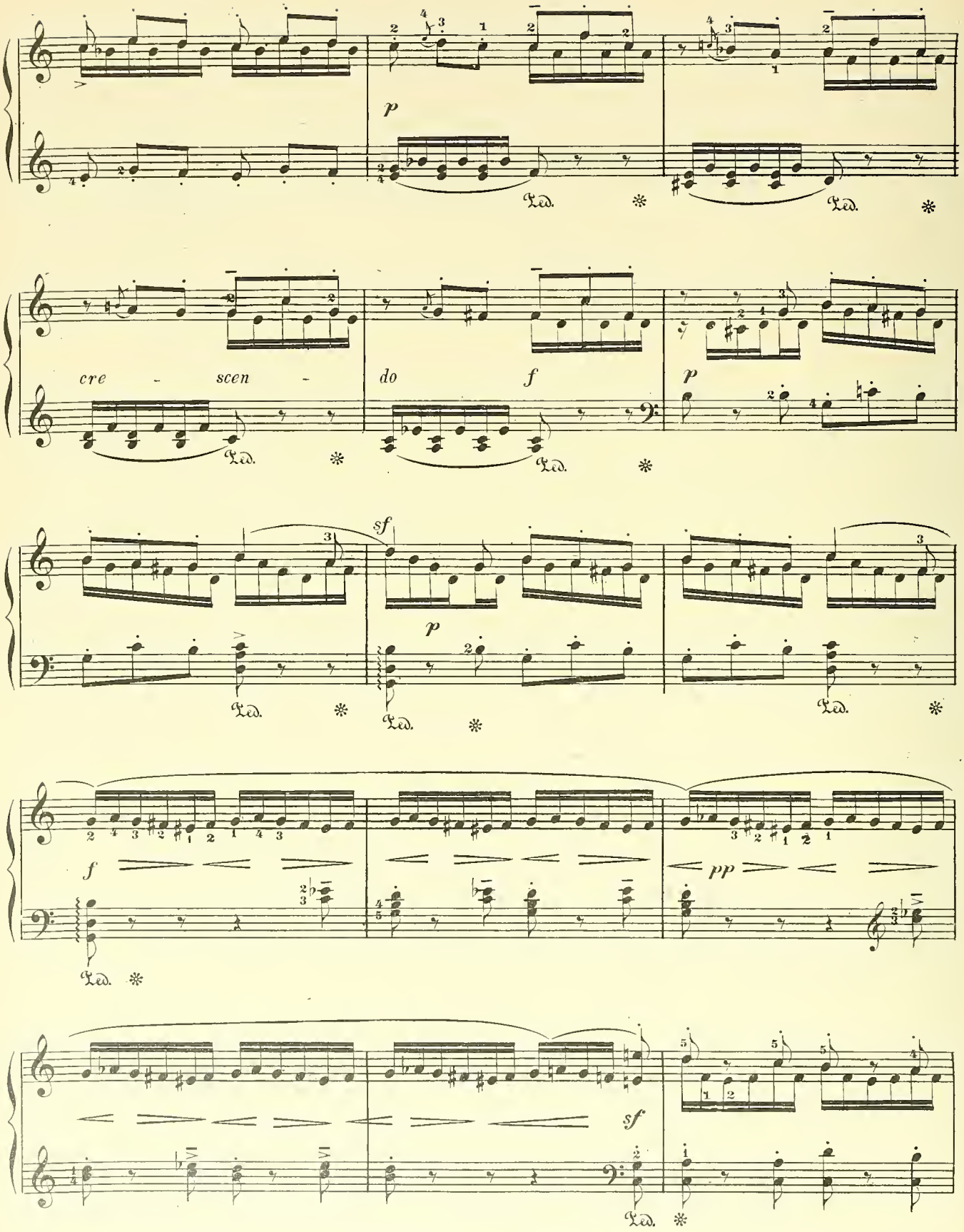
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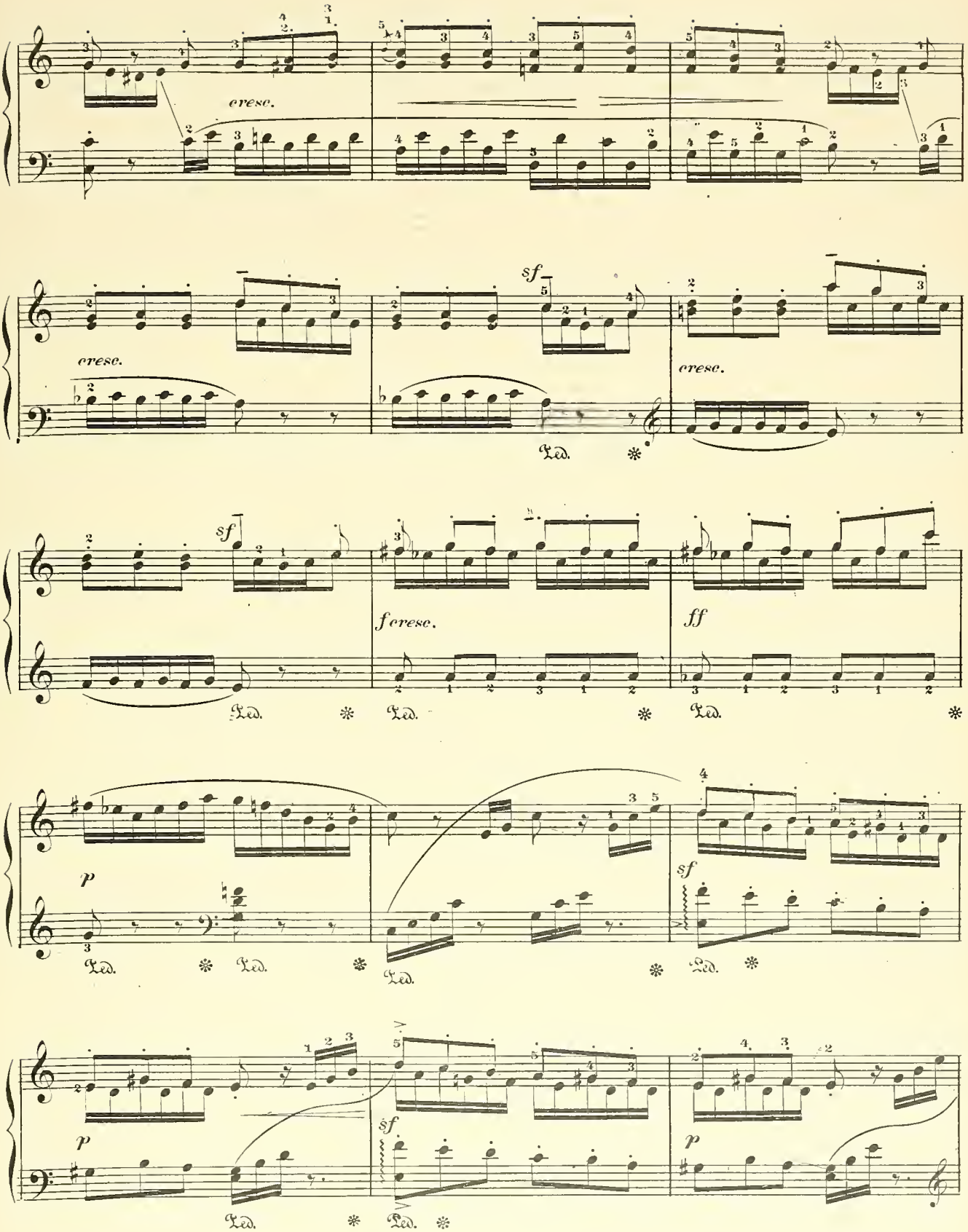
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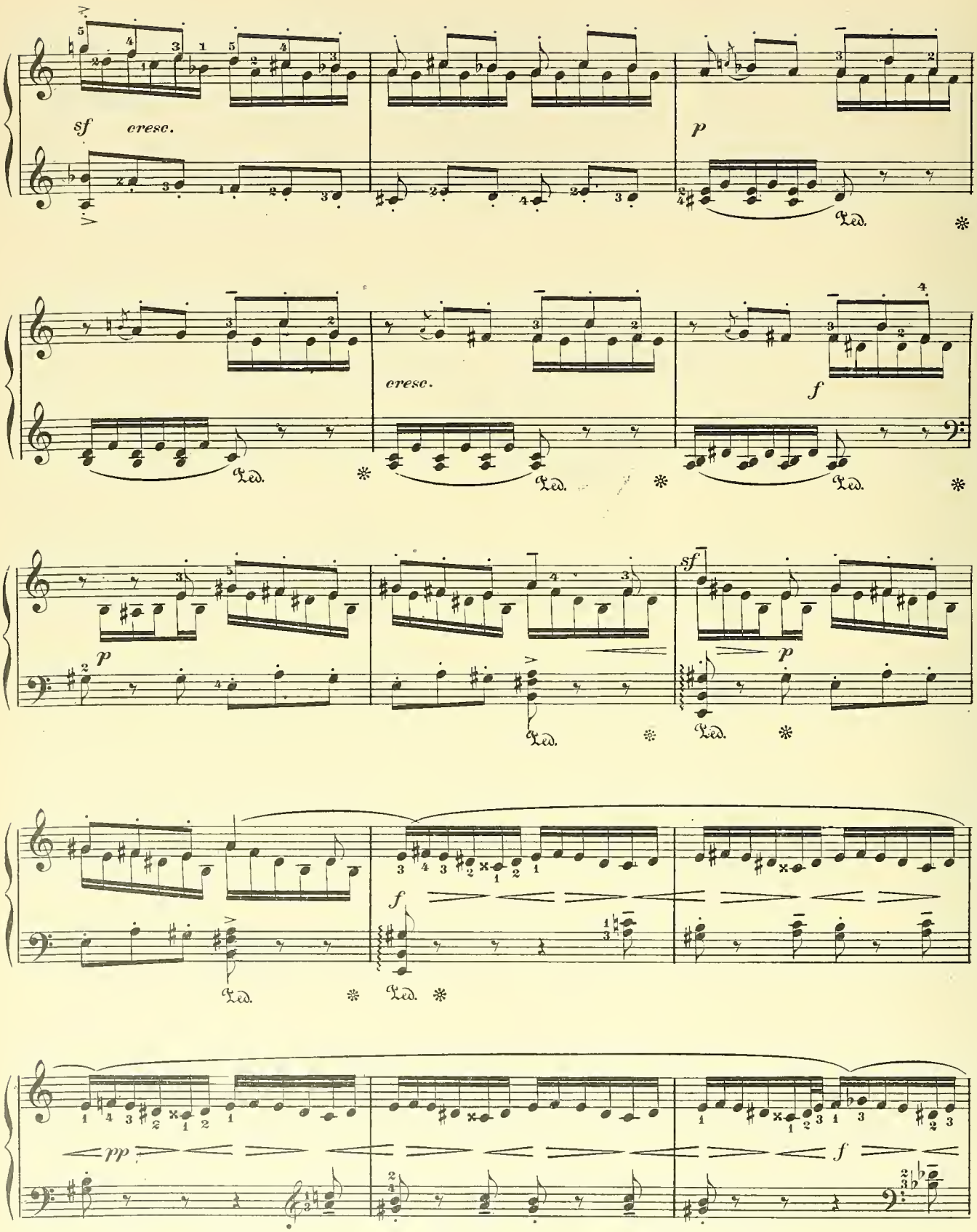
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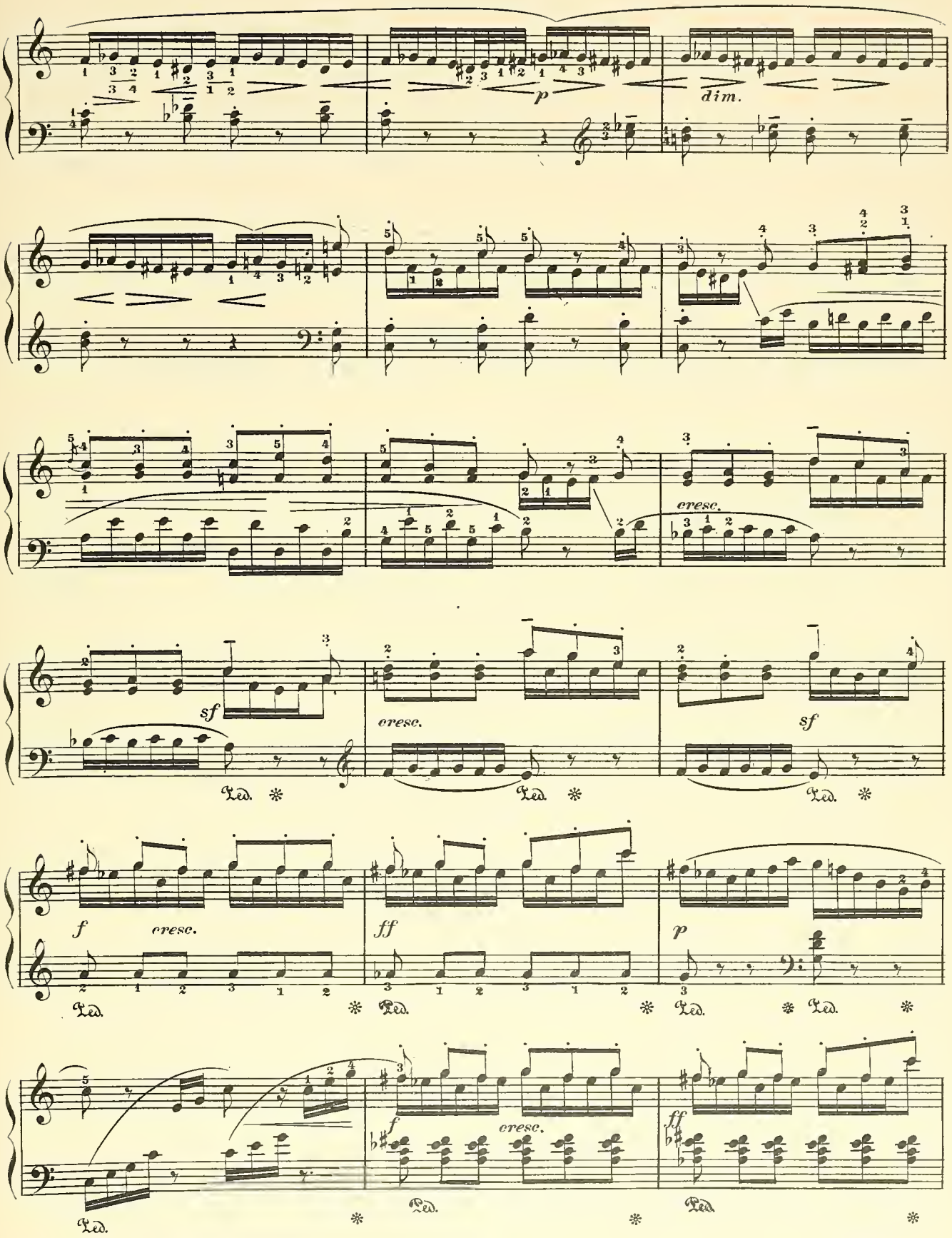
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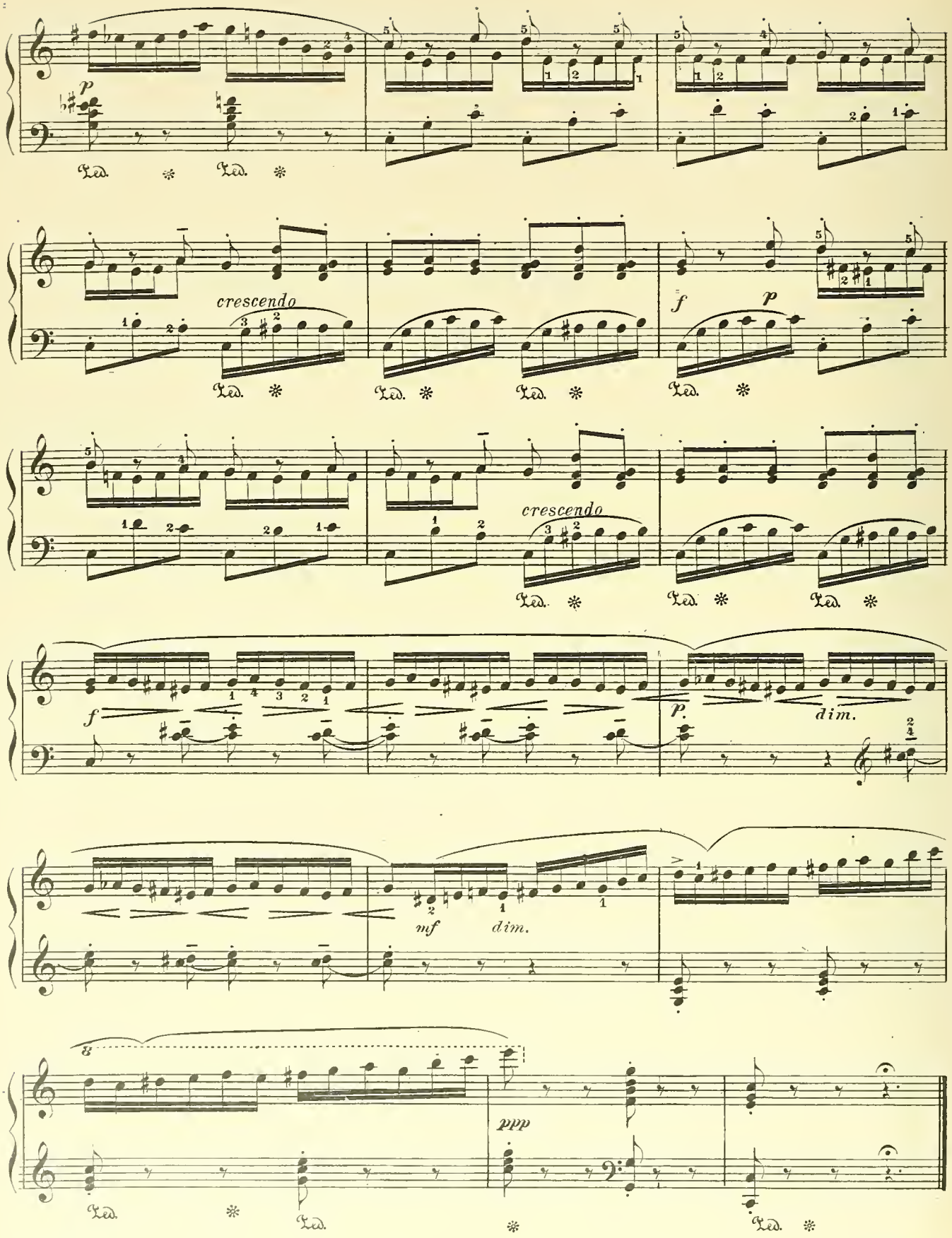
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MEMORANDA

MEMORANDA

CHAPTER EXAMINATION

1. Give the years of the birth and death of Mendelssohn.

2. What musical attribute is prominent in Mendelssohn's music?

3. What is the principal basis of a musical thought?

4. How do you justify the title Song Without Words as applied to Mendelssohn's compositions for the piano? Who first used the term?

5. Define: *Chant sans paroles; Lieder ohne Wörter.*

6. What is meant by the term melodic outline? Upon what technical structure is a melody dependent? Upon what must perception of melody depend?

7. In harmonizations of even-length tones, to which voice will the melodic interest be first attracted? Under what conditions may an inner-voiced melody become prominent?

8. In rhythmic designs which are composed of *broken* chords, which tones are most melodically prominent? By what means may a melodic outline be produced in some other voice when *broken* chord designs follow each other?

9. Describe the programmatic character of the SPINNING SONG. Analyze its structural form. What are the modulations? To whom is its authorship sometimes attributed?

10. What are the three primary elements of music?

Student Percentage

Examined by Date

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